

Informing the Profession
about Intellectual Freedom

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WHETHER THERE is a plethora or a virtual scarcity of information about intellectual freedom available to the library profession depends in large part on whether one is concerned about gaining an historical perspective or with knowing what is going on currently. Even the word "currently" usually needs to be defined broadly in terms of months, since it is rarely applicable in terms of days or hours, unless use of the telephone is not precluded. The library press is just not very well adapted to providing prompt coverage of the news and issues about intellectual freedom. Nor can it be said that librarians interested in, concerned with, or involved in matters of intellectual freedom are especially aware of the need to communicate—and promptly—for the benefit of their professional colleagues. What follows, then, is an account of the media of communication about intellectual freedom available to the profession, arranged in a rough progression from the general and retrospective to the particular and current.

Basic to a comprehensive view of intellectual freedom is Ralph McCoy's *Freedom of the Press: An Annotated Bibliography*, published in 1968. This monumental work affords access to "some 8,000 books, pamphlets, journal articles, films and other material . . . in English-speaking countries from the beginning of printing to the present."¹ A continuing selective bibliography, more closely limited to the interest of librarians, may be found regularly in the *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom*.²

Many of the important essays and documents have been brought together into one anthology or another; *The First Freedom*³ by Robert B. Downs being the most significant and complete. More recently,

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Eric Moon has brought together relevant essays from the *Library Journal* under the title *Book Selection and Censorship in the Sixties*.⁴ Some of the more prominent confrontations with the forces of censorship appear in Everett T. Moore's *Issues of Freedom in American Libraries*,⁵ gleaned from his column in the *ALA Bulletin*. Of somewhat different ilk is *Censorship Landmarks*,⁶ an anthology of court cases going back to 1663, which contains an introduction by its editor Edward de Grazia that is itself a landmark.

Several works concerning intellectual freedom in libraries warrant specific mention, beginning with Lester Asheim's "Not Censorship but Selection,"⁷ which is probably the most quoted and reprinted essay in the field. Marjorie Fiske's *Book Selection and Censorship*⁸ stands alone as the major research effort concerning intellectual freedom in school and public libraries. Her principal, much too simplified, point was that librarians do more censoring than anybody, to which the immediate professional reaction was a combination of "It ain't so," and "We knew it all the time." Important also was the follow-up symposium designed to publicize the Fiske report, edited by J. Periam Danton under the title, *The Climate of Book Selection*.⁹ A latterday synthesis of much of the foregoing may be found in this writer's *Book Selection and Intellectual Freedom*.¹⁰

Nearly as basic as these books and essays are statements of policy developed and written to inform the profession and the public of the posture of the leadership of the library profession on matters involving intellectual freedom. The Library Bill of Rights was first promulgated by the American Library Association in 1939; it has been somewhat revised several times, most recently in 1967. Subsidiary to it and somewhat redundant is the School Library Bill of Rights, adopted by the American Association of School Librarians in 1955. Although somewhat dated now, the Freedom to Read Statement, developed jointly by librarians and publishers and adopted by the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers' Council in 1953, has proven itself to be important and useful. Less of an issue now than when it was approved in 1951 is the ALA statement on "Labeling Library Materials." Of more immediate usefulness to librarians on the firing line is the 1962 statement of "How Libraries and Schools Can Resist Censorship," a practical roster of things to do before and after the censor comes. Of even greater importance are locally developed statements of selection policy for every library designed to inform the public about the library's posture on matters of selection

and intellectual freedom, and to guide the library staff in its regular selection activity. The Enoch Pratt Free Library has published a most excellent example of this genre.¹¹ Except for the latter, which is available from the library, all of the above statements of policy are available in quantity from the Intellectual Freedom Office of the American Library Association in Chicago.

Regular serial publications in the area of intellectual freedom, which have not been many in number, may best be described as newsletters, of which the *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom*¹² is at once the oldest and the most specifically related to the interests of librarians. Originated as a means of informing the profession about intellectual freedom matters, it has in recent years attempted also to become a journal of record bent on reporting all library-related controversies as well as important legislation and court decisions in other areas. It has in recent years been significantly supplemented by *Censorship Today*,¹³ edited by Mrs. Stanley Fleishman. Within the limitations of a bi-monthly magazine, coverage of library matters is minimal, of other matters maximal. Other regular workers in this vineyard are *FoI Digest*¹⁴ and its attendant *Reports*¹⁵ on specific issues and *Free Speech*.¹⁶

Not precisely on the same side of the issue, but indispensable to a comprehensive view of intellectual freedom and the tendencies toward censorship are the *Newsletter* of the National Organization for Decent Literature¹⁷ and *The National Decency Reporter*.¹⁸ The former has a monthly list of "Publications Disapproved for Youth," and includes some lists of books which *are* recommended. Each quarter several pages of forematter report the current censorious activity, often with a certain wry humor. The bi-monthly organ of Citizens for Decent Literature, on the other hand, is always deadly serious.

This roster of current journals would not be complete without mention of *American Libraries* (formerly *ALA Bulletin*), *Library Journal*, and the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, all of which have been faithful in recent years in reporting the news and the controversy within the profession to the profession. The *ALA Bulletin* (*American Libraries*) has carried additionally a monthly column on "Intellectual Freedom" since 1960, ably conducted by Everett T. Moore, Ervin J. Gaines, and Judith F. Krug. Various state association journals have been helpful in spreading the word by publishing special issues devoted to intellectual freedom. Notable examples in recent years have occurred in Wisconsin,¹⁹ Indiana,²⁰ Missouri,²¹ and New England.²²

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Reporting is one thing, however, and getting a point across is another. For the latter objective the mounting of a conference designed to inform the profession of its obligations to intellectual freedom in libraries can be much more effective. Four such conferences have been sponsored by the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the American Library Association and have made substantial contributions to the literature,²³ as did that sponsored by the University of California School of Librarianship to publicize the Fiske report.²⁴ State library associations can also have a significant impact in this area. A recent 1969 exemplification was the special "Conference on Censorship" sponsored by the University of Missouri Freedom of Information Center, the Missouri State Library, and the Missouri Library Association, held in Columbia in February. In a somewhat different format, the Nevada Library Association built its October 1969, annual conference around the theme of "The Challenges of Intellectual Freedom."

It would seem to be clear that there ought to be information enough for the profession in matters of intellectual freedom. And so there is, of a retrospective, after-the-fact, this-is-what-happened character. Still lacking, however, and likely to continue lacking, is prompt, day-to-day reporting by the people concerned so that the profession can be informed and be in a position to act in a beleaguered librarian's behalf—provided he is wanting help and assistance. Ah, there is the rub!

Local authorities are wary of outside "interference" and librarians are chary of involving their colleagues, no matter how well-intentioned or potentially effective they may be. When the chips are down, each man is almost necessarily very much alone. So perhaps—perhaps because I still wish to reserve judgment—the best we can do for the profession is already being done in the various manifestations described above—all of which are bent on informing the profession of theory, problems, and solutions so that each librarian can be as well informed as possible, can have developed and buttressed his own conviction as cogently as is a priori practicable—all against the day the lightning strikes his own library.

When that day comes, the beleaguered librarian should have available the services of his state library association intellectual freedom committee, and will have available the services of the American Library Association Intellectual Freedom Office, now ably directed by Judith F. Krug, since its establishment at ALA Headquarters in Chicago in December, 1967. The two avenues are very much inter-related in that Krug has been working hard at developing lines of communi-

cation between her office and the state intellectual freedom committees, having developed a monthly memorandum for that purpose. Help from both sources can, however, be forthcoming only if the local librarian works diligently at keeping the state committee and the Chicago office informed on a regular, perhaps even daily basis, and on his enunciating precisely the kind of help he needs in his local situation.

Should the ultimate extremity be reached in the cause of intellectual freedom, and a librarian be removed from his position or caused to resign, he now has available to him the services of the Freedom to Read Foundation, an independent membership organization established in November 1969,

- to promote and protect freedom of speech and freedom of press as such freedoms are guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States and as such freedoms necessarily involve the public right to hear what is spoken and to read what is written;

- to promote the recognition and acceptance of libraries as repositories of the world's accumulated wisdom and knowledge and to protect the public right of access to such wisdom and knowledge;

- to support the right of libraries to include in their collections and to make available to the public any creative work which they may legally acquire;

- to supply legal counsel, which counsel may or may not be directly employed by the Foundation, and otherwise to provide support to such libraries and librarians as are suffering legal injustices by reason of their defense of freedom of speech and freedom of press as guaranteed by law against efforts to subvert such freedoms through suppression or censorship to the extent such libraries and librarians may request such aid and require it on account of poverty or inability to obtain legal counsel without assistance.²⁵

The key to obtaining such assistance, legal or financial, is again a matter of communication, for the controlling language is, "to the extent such libraries and librarians may request such aid." The Foundation will not offer unsolicited advice or aid. Though not a part of its intent, the Foundation thus has become an avenue of communication between the librarian in difficulty in behalf of intellectual freedom and the library profession as represented by its fifteen-member board of trustees and headquarters staff.

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